

THE EFFECTS OF AGE, OCCUPATION, RACE AND EDUCATION ON PARENT COMMUNICATION WITH THE SCHOOL

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One of the educational problems that has been widely published in the press and articulated by parent groups has been the difficulty of communicating with the school. Parents appear to believe that elementary educational institutions are both dogmatic and authoritarian (Cronin & Hacker, 1973). School personnel have been viewed by parents as specialized experts who bully parents with their expertise (Doebler, 1971). Wilkerson, (1970), asserted the economically poor minority parents are made to feel uncomfortable when they visit the school by officious and paternalizing school personnel.

Ryan (1976) has stated that parents are generally uncomfortable in school situations even though they are supportive and anxious about their children's progress. Teachers, Ryan continues, are uncomfortable about discussing children with parents and tend to reject any information that might sound like advice because of the possibility that it might reflect upon their professional competence.

The problem of parent-school communication is as important as it is complicated. The perception of school communication by the parents is an important factor and it is susceptible to many influences. Age, education and occupation were thought to be salient factors in determining the expressed perceptions of parents towards communications with the school.

Method

Four schools out of a universe of 28 schools in Gary, Indiana were randomly selected. All teachers assigned to the four

schools were asked to participate in the study. All teachers agreed to participate. Parents or guardians of students in the third and fourth grades of the randomly selected schools were asked to participate in the study.

Procedures

All parents in the third and fourth grades received a letter soliciting their cooperation. They were then sent a copy of the Parent-School Communication Questionnaire (PSCQ). This instrument contains 25 items. Factor analysis of the instrument has indicated that three factors have the effect of being school-parent boundaries.

Factor I —Teacher Parent Interaction (TPI)

Factor II —Parent-Principal Interaction (PPI)

Factor III —Assessability (ASSES)
According to Winer (1975), its developer:

"Information gleaned from the instrument may be used as base line data for structuring or improving school-community programs". (p. 6)

The instruments were mailed to the parents and returned in a pre-addressed and stamped envelope. No identification was placed on the envelope or on the instrument to safeguard anonymity. 83% of the questionnaires were returned filled out.

Results

In the area of teacher-parent interaction age ($p < .05$) and occupation ($p < .01$) were found to affect the perception

of TPI. The joint effects of age and occupation was found to be highly significant ($p < .001$). The educational level of the parents was also significant ($p < .001$) while race of parents exerted no effect whatever.

In the area of parent-principal interaction only the occupation of the parent had any effect ($p < .01$). In the area of assessability age ($p < .05$) occupation ($p < .001$) and the interaction between age and occupation ($p < .001$) and the interaction between age and occupation ($p < .001$) were significant. The effect of education was also very significant ($p < .01$). Race had no effect on the parents viewpoints.

Discussion

It was quite apparent from the results that parents particularly those in the 20-30 age bracket were satisfied with the level of interaction with teachers. Those parents who fell into the housewife category also had a positive view of teacher-parent interactions. These findings are not at all surprising for younger parents who have the energy and motivation to visit the school often and especially if they had no employment responsibilities. The educational level also made a difference with high school graduates being the most active group. This also would tend to indicate that higher levels of education would be more critical of the teacher and would find interacting difficult.

In the area of principal-parent interactions only the occupational level of the parent made a difference in the responses. Most of the favorable responses were made by housewives who would have the time to visit the school and interact with the principal.

In the area of assessability, age, occupation and its joint effects exerted an impact. Education also was a potent determinant of parent response.

The problem seems to be at the principals level. This might be an indication

TABLE 1
Analysis of Variance for TPI, PPI, ASSES for Age, OCC, Race and Ed

Source	TPI			PPI			Asses		
	Ms	df	F	Ms	df	F	Ms	df	F
Age	.526	4	2.540*	.59	4	1.047	.652	4	2.442*
Occ	.709	3	3.421**	2.181	3	4.317**	2.067	3	7.737***
Age X Occ	.668	8	3.223***	.894	8	1.769	.957	8	3.582***
Race	.363	3	1.710	.142	3	.275	.145	3	.495
Ed	.919	6	4.334***	.529	6	1.022	.809	6	2.759**
Race X Ed	.068	6	.319	.688	6	1.328	.074	6	.251

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

that parents do not view the upper echelon of the schools as being sensitive to their problems. While the parents view the school as being accessible and the

teachers as being friends, the principal is viewed as remote and unwilling to communicate.

References

Cronin, J., and Hailer, R., *Organizing An Urban Schools System for Diversity*, Lexington Books, Massa Chutes, 1973.

Doebler, C. H., *Planning Your Child's Education*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971.

Ryan, C., *The Open Partnerships Equality in Running the Schools*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976.

Wilkerson, D. A., The failure of schools serving the Black and the Puerto Rican poor in *Schools Against Children*, by A T. Rubenstein, monthly Review Press, New York.

1982 Internships/Colleen Cannon. Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1982, 328 pp. The book contains more than 16,000 short-term job opportunities — located throughout the United States and covering a wide range of careers. They are designed to let one try out a potential career on a temporary basis. In each listing are included the following (1) Description of duties, (2) Length/season of internship, (3) Qualifications for position, (4) Application contacts, procedures, and deadline dates; (5) Pay and fringe benefits, and (6) availability of college credit. Included are articles on how to choose the right internship, where to find inexpensive housing, application procedures, plus a new chapter on internships for adults

The New York Times Selective Guide to Colleges 1982-83, Edward B. Fiske. Times Books, New York, 1982, 432 pp. The author maintains that the only way to choose the right college is to get the best inside information on what the college really is like. This guide is more valuable than have a friend who has gone there and then checking his facts with the administration. The New York Times has gone to the campuses of over 250 of the best colleges and found the answers contained in this book. It tries to cover the things which the catalogs and counselors tend to leave out. The book is based on a survey of high school counselors to find out what kind of information would be valuable to help high school graduates select the right college for their interests and goals. They narrowed the field of over 3,000 colleges to the 250 that best serve the changing academic interests of today's college student and then went out to these colleges to get the facts that are included in this book. Some of the questions that are answered are: What are the chances of getting in? What are the most visible life-styles? Which are the strongest and weakest departments? For each college Fiske has provided a unique rating of the academic atmosphere, the social life, and the quality of life.